

bmj.com news roundup

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City reacts negatively as GlaxoSmithKline announces plans for new drugs

Europe's biggest drug company, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), saw its share price fall 4% last week, despite unveiling details of its "product pipeline" for the next five years.

GSK's chief executive, Jean-Pierre Garnier, told London market analysts: "There is no doubt that after 2006, GSK will outpace the rest of the industry." But investors saw little prospect of immediate gain, with most of the new drugs years away from possible approval with regulatory hurdles still to overcome.

This week's newspapers suggested that GSK had shot itself in the foot when its vice president of genetic research, Allen Roses, told a scientific meeting in London that the "vast majority of drugs only work in 30 or 50% of people." It was reported on the front page of the *Independent* newspaper on 8 December.

The size of the drugs pipeline was impressive, with 147 new drugs being tested, including 82 completely new molecules. But some of the most commercially promising drugs are to be delayed, most notably a dual kinase inhibitor for solid tumours known only as 572 016, which will be filed for approval in 2005, a year later than expected.

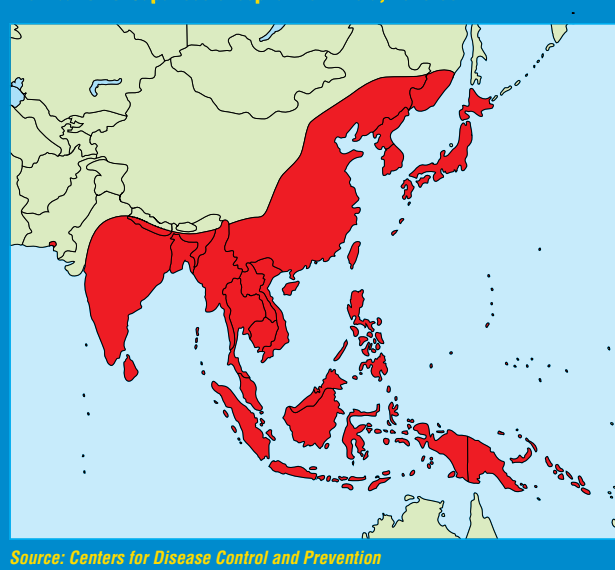
Owen Dyer *London*

Adolescents are building up health problems for the future

Adolescents are taking risks that could affect their future health and that could swamp medical services in years to come unless appropriate interventions are made now, warn doctors.

Children and young adults aged between 11 and 19 years are eating unhealthy diets and not taking enough exercise, and

Distribution of Japanese encephalitis in Asia, 1970-98



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Bill Gates boosts fight against virus that threatens three billion in Asia

Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates has donated \$27m (£16m; €22m) to step up the fight against a debilitating virus that kills one in three of its victims.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation this week announced funding for a five year programme to combat Japanese encephalitis, the leading cause of viral encephalitis in Asia.

Almost half of all cases of the disease, a mosquito borne flavivirus, result in long term disability, including paralysis, seizures, and mental disability.

A third of victims, mainly children aged under 15, die. The condition is untreatable but can be prevented through vaccination.

The Children's Vaccination Project at the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), in Seattle, Washington, will use the money to accelerate development of an improved vaccine and bolster disease surveillance. The current vaccine is expensive and in short supply. It is derived from mouse brain and requires one mouse to produce each dose. Three doses are needed to gain 90% efficacy, and boosters are given every three years.

Amanda Elliot *London*

more than one in five is overweight or obese, says the BMA's board of science and education, in a report entitled *Adolescent Health*. An alarming number of people in this age group also drink large quantities of alcohol; British adolescents have one of the highest rates of binge drinking in Europe.

Smoking, drug taking, and risky sexual behaviour are also on the increase among adolescents, says the report. And all of these types of behaviour can lead to physical and psychological problems.

Providing health services for adolescents in schools is not

enough, say the authors, because often these services will fail to reach the most vulnerable members in the age group.

Zosia Kmiotowicz *London*

Adolescent Health can be seen at www.bma.org

Plan launched to tackle hospital infections

The British government has announced new plans to tackle the problem of hospital acquired infections, which affect about

100 000 Britons each year and generate costs of £1bn (\$1.7bn; €1.4bn).

The new plans, proposed by chief medical officer, Professor Liam Donaldson, include appointing a director of infection control with the power to enforce infection control measures at every NHS trust. The plans also promise a new drive to ensure that staff wash their hands frequently.

Recently, Britain has struggled with one of the highest rates of methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infection in northern Europe. Data from the first two years of a new surveillance programme show that the number of MRSA bacteraemias in England rose from 7281 in 2001 to 7384 in 2002.

Barry Cookson, an expert in the field with the Health Protection Agency, attributed the problem chiefly to Britain's high rates of bed occupancy.

Stephen Pincock *London*

More details of the plans can be accessed at www.doh.gov.uk/cmo/hai/winningways.pdf

New health research centre set up in Wales

A new health research centre launched in Wales this week will investigate a wide range of issues, from diabetes prevention to the effects of speed cameras on road traffic injuries.

The Centre for Health Improvement Research and Evaluation, which is based in the Swansea clinical school of the University of Wales, brings together several individual research groups. They will carry out research on improving the quality of patient care, maximising the cost effectiveness of service delivery, and developing primary prevention strategies for public health problems.

There will be four main research areas: epidemiology and prevention; health services research; patient involvement; and health informatics. New initiatives in health and social care will also be evaluated.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*